

Arlington Conservation Commission
Minutes
March 3, 2016

Mr. Stevens called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. in the second floor conference room, of the Town Hall Annex. Present were Nathaniel Stevens, David White, Mike Nonni, Charles Tirone, Susan Chapnick, Catherine Garnett, Curt Connors and Janine White. Associate Eileen Coleman was not present. Also present were Planning Director Jennifer Raitt, Jennifer Brown, Bruce Whelple, Sue Doctrow, Daniel Gillis, John Belskis, Roy Goldstein, Brenda Phillips, Walter Phillips, Chris Rowell, Alexandra Rowell, Eugene Benson, Brian Rehrig, Wynelle Evans, Ann LeRoyer, and John Consilvio.

7:30pm – Commission Business:

7:35pm – Introducing the new Planning Director, Jennifer Raitt

Ms. Beckwith asked the Commission if they would like to hear a presentation on a stormwater treatment device. They directed Ms. Beckwith to discuss it with the Town Engineer for his opinion.

DWhite/Connors motioned to approve the 2/4 **minutes** with edits; motion passed unanimously.

DWhite/Connors motioned to approve the 2/25 **minutes** with edits; motion passed unanimously.

Mr. White met with an Eagle Scout to look at a potential trail project at Cookes Hollow. They will also go to Mt. Gilboa to look at the paths there.

7:45pm **Discussion** – Mt Gilboa warrant article

Mr. Belskis presented his proposed warrant article to swap land at Mt. Gilboa with some at Great Meadows, and transfer this land to the Housing Authority, in order to increase the land area used for affordable housing within Arlington. He claimed that the proposed parcel with the house, which includes 1.76 acres, would add onto the existing 1.53% area. He believes this increase is necessary since some of the area will decrease as affordable units sunset and revert to market rate.

Mr. Connors asked why this property was chosen to take out of conservation protection. Mr. Belskis replied because it has a house on it and was already owned by the Town. Mr. Connors stated that the Conservation Commission is charged with promoting preservation of conservation lands. Given the importance of both affordable housing and preserving conservation values in a dense town, Mr. Connors asked Mr. Belskis to explain his reasoning that one important value should be sacrificed for the other. Mr. Connors also asked whether Mr. Belskis had approached the Arlington Housing Authority and whether they had expressed any interest in the property. Mr. Belskis said

he had not.

Mr. Tirone asked if they considered any other properties. Mr. Belskis did not have any other properties in mind.

Mr. White asked if any other Town entity was in support of this warrant article. Mr. Belskis stated that he and 10 citizens submitted the draft warrant article, and that, to this date, no other Town entity is supporting this article, however, this was the first official solicitation for a town committee approval.

Mr. Rehrig, spoke on his own behalf, even though he is a board member of the Arlington Land Trust which has come out against the warrant article. He understands the impetus of this warrant, to attempt to deter the future project at Mugar, but cannot imagine a worse way to go about it than to use this parcel, which is protected by Article 97. Arlington is the third densest town in the Commonwealth. To overturn the protection of Article 97 would require a unanimous vote of the Conservation Commission. An unfortunate consequence of a discussion such as this, is the pitting of affordable housing needs against environmental needs. He read from Section II of the EEA Article 91 land disposition policy. We shouldn't have to be so divisive.

Ms. Garnett spoke of her experience working for DCR, and how small parcels of state-owned land were proposed for other purposes. She stated that, to change the Article 97 protections were almost never successful and it was often a time consuming process.

Ms. LeRoyer, Chair of the Arlington Open Space Committee, spoke to the newest Open Space Plan, just completed last year that highlights the Mt. Gilboa property as a prize protected open space. She is against the transfer and stated that there should be other options for affordable housing.

Dr. Phillips, a child psychologist and neighbor, spoke of recent studies showing open space, parks, and natural areas being essential components to healthy child development. She also lives nearby this open space with its view scape. The forested land also helps reduce noise pollution.

Mr. Goldstein, neighbor, asked how the area was derived? Mr. White answered that there are multiple lots that make up the entire Mt. Gilboa conservation land. The lot containing the house is 1.76 acres. Mr. Goldstein also pointed out that the historic district is another player of protection for this property. Mr. Goldstein also asked if the property in another town, Arlington Great Meadows in Lexington, could even be used to substitute/swap for this land in Arlington as suggested by the Warrant Article. Mr. Connors responded that was a very good question. Mr. Stevens noted that Town Counsel said that is a legal issue that would need to be resolved if this warrant article is approved.

Ms. LeRoyer asked how is the property zoned. Is it R1 or the new Open Space zone? No one knew.

Mr. Consilvio, neighbor, asked if the existing house could be removed and multiple units built on that land, if this warrant article were approved. The Commission would lose control of the property, so it would be unable to prevent such an occurrence.

Mr. Connors stated that while the Commission would like to see better protections of Arlington's Great Meadows in Lexington, that this is not the way to do it. This results in a net loss for protected land.

Mr. Connors asked Ms. Garnett how long it took for the few examples of land transfers out of Article 97 protections. She responded that it could take several years, even with full agreement.

Mr. Phillips, a neighbor, stated that to take open space and build housing is not Conservation and not consistent with Arlington's Open Space Plan. The area has an affordable housing project taking place nearby on Westminster St, that is composed of 9 units. There is another on Appleton St.

Mr. Gillis, neighbor, asked what % of the area is this parcel? The whole property is approximately 10 acres. The top parcel is 1.7 acres; therefore, it is 17% of this parcel. The total amount of Conservation land in Arlington is only 30+ acres.

Ms. Chapnick stated that if the top parcel were transferred and rebuilt for Affordable Housing (redeveloped into more units), that these would impact the surrounding open space lots which are steep grades. Redevelopment of the top parcel would negatively impact the remaining open-space conservation land.

Mr. White stated that he is not in support of this article, and that he has not heard any compelling argument in its support. He read a statement clarifying his position to include in the formal recommendation to the Board of Selectmen.

DWhite/Connors motioned to oppose this warrant article with the language Mr. White drafted; motion passed unanimously. Mr. Stevens will draft a letter informing the Board of Selectmen of the Commission's vote to oppose.

Mt. Gilboa Warrant Article

The Conservation Commission opposes Article 30 regarding the transfer of Mt. Gilboa property to the Arlington Housing Authority.

It is our responsibility to protect conservation land, and this proposal is very detrimental to that purpose.

Arlington has very little conservation land – about thirty acres total. The Mt. Gilboa conservation area at 10.7 acres is the largest and most attractive of those parcels. To transfer roughly 1.7 acres from the center and top of this would both reduce valuable

conservation land and have a very negative impact on the remaining area. Also once the land is transferred, Article 97 protections will be lost and there is nothing to prevent future development of that site whatever current intentions might be.

*The transfer also goes against the long range plan of the Conservation Commission to improve public access at the top of the hill with an accessible vista park.
We are supportive of affordable housing in appropriate locations, but Mt. Gilboa is not such a place.*

Commission Business (cont.):

The Commission discussed the project to protect the **shoreline of Spy Pond**. Ms. Garnett and Mr. Nonni will present the application to the Community Preservation Committee on March 16 at 7:35pm. Ms. Garnett is also presenting this to the Park and Rec Committee.

The Commission will hold a **cleanup of Meadowbrook Park** on April 9 from 9 to noon.

Ms. Beckwith presented a request to access the lot next to 86 **Coolidge Rd**, with a backhoe. The request included a site plan and the proposed work area. Ms. Beckwith will visit the site next week to confirm the plan information and take pictures.

Mr. Benson discussed his new position as Director of **MACC**. He is excited to announce some new online courses for busy Commissioners. He outlined some pending legislative challenges. He described the useful aspects of the online Environmental Handbook (searchable, linked).

Mr. Stevens revised the **Conservation Projects** list. Ms. Chapnick noted that the next step would be to prioritize these.

Mr. Tirone reported that he has a new potential CPC project for a **raingarden** in Menotomy Rock Parks.

Meeting adjourned at 9:55pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Corinna Beckwith
Commission Administrator